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29 January 1980

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The National Consultative Assembly

Iran's parliament--the Majles or National Consultative Assembly--will number 270 members elected to four-year terms by direct ballot. The membership of the Assembly is to be increased every ten years in proportion to population growth. Certain seats within the Assembly will be reserved. Zoroastrians and Jews will each have one representative, for example, and various Christian sects will elect their own representatives. (U)

The constitution contains no details concerning the elections to the National Assembly, noting that specific regulations should be established by "a separate law." The Interior Ministry has now promulgated some of these regulations. One requiring that candidates have written clerical approval to participate in the elections is an apparent effort to limit the number of candidates. The regulations also provide for runoff elections in cases where a candidate does not acquire an absolute majority. Other regulations stipulate the nature of the constituencies. Though we lack information on the geographical boundaries of most of the constituencies, a regulation which divides Tehran into two separate constituencies suggests that they are being set. (C)

The Interior Ministry will have the responsibility for announcing the date of the elections to the National Assembly. While Bani-Sadr has indicated he wants the elections held on 15 February as originally scheduled, the Interior Ministry earlier this week announced that the elections would be held during the month running between 20 February and 20 March. The issue here is Bani-Sadr's apparent desire to maintain his momentum, and the desire of other political figures--presumably including leaders of the Islamic Republic Party like Beheshti--to regroup their forces after a disastrous showing in the presidential election. No final decision has been made, though

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it is noteworthy that the Interior Minister, Rafsanjani, is a Revolutionary Council member and apparent ally of Beheshti, and would thus probably lean toward setting a later date. (C)

The National Assembly will have certain initial responsibilities of political significance. The Prime Minister, who will be nominated by the president, must be approved by the National Assembly. The Council of Ministers, who will be nominated by the Prime Minister, will have to be approved by both the National Assembly and the president. (U)

Also of significance will be the Council of Guardians which is empowered to review all legislation passed by the Assembly. There will be twelve members of the Council, six religious figures and six lawyers "in different branches of the law." The six religious figures, who are appointed by the religious leader will have the major role since a majority of these six members is required to pass on questions of fidelity to Islam while a majority of all twelve is required only on questions of constitutionality. (C)

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